

UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

Vol. 19

No. 6

July 31, 1981

Chicago, Illinois

An Educational Group

YOU WILL NEVER know what is enough until
you know what is more than enough.

- William Blake

* * * * *

Theatre des Champs - Elysees, Saison
De Paris, March 1950.

It was here that I received the intelligence, that our school in Chicago must be vacated. Progress had raised its ugly head and two famous Theatres, The Four Cohans (then the Grand) and the Erlanger (formerly the Palace) of vaudeville renown and a famous restaurant, Henricis, disappeared to make way for the "Tower of rust", the City Hall. Fortunately helped by the Picasso - all has rusted quite agreeably.

Remembering a small building on Madison near Wells that I had passed for years (Schools of Dance in Office Buildings are considered a nuisance) - for that reason and space most schools in all major cities tend to be in declasse neighborhoods. Here was a place in the middle of the Loop not far enough west to be declasse. It housed "The Chess Club", so I figured the rent would not be too astronomical, if a bunch of old fogys could afford it. I wrote Walter Camryn to inquire, which he successfully did with Mark Levy, Bless his Soul, and we had a home again.

It took a whole summer's work and a delayed opening to get the place in shape. Fortunately the vermin and the bugs had long since given up - the place had been vacant so long. So apart from removing hundreds of yards of wiring and fighting off battalions of gamblers, which we did for more than a year, we were free to get our new home in shape. This we did so successfully that a year later Mark Levy

without being asked gave us a new leveled floor for the dance space - with the hope that we would stay at least twenty years. A hope we have more than fulfilled.

Life is a series of plateaus. Now for us one of unusually long duration. Our pupils have been interesting and have moved around the world in various activities of dance with notable success. Our neighbors on Madison Street have all been good neighbors and many have become fast friends. We will hate to leave. Our dear pianists, MADELENE HARGADON and HILDUR NELSON who were with us until the most recent years made life in the classroom a pleasure. The studio became a way of life not only for the teachers but for the pupils as well. They studied there, it was their social, as well as intellectual home - and from there they went out into the world. Every blessed one of them on his own - no arrangements made. It took the dance world sometime to know this. But they, the pupils were and have continued to be free to develop and make their own lives and careers for themselves. Once in a while one or more will ask the "should I" questions, but in the end realize they have the knowledge for "make or break" decisions. I think Walter Camryn is as proud of them as I am. Still this does lead to an Ivory Tower, closing out of the world in a sense - yet a teacher cannot be a fund raiser - local booster - social advisor etc., and still remain a teacher. We opted for the latter and I do not regret it. Chicago may have missed all that we have done. However, that will live long beyond us in our pupils.

- Bently Stone

ELMER (substitute Walter) - was puzzled over a GIRL (substitute Chicago) problem and discussed it with his pal JOE (substitute Bentley).

"I've walked to school with her three times", he told Joe, "and carried her books. I bought her ice-cream soda twice. Now, do you think I ought to kiss her?"

"No, you don't need to." Joe decided, after a moment of deep thought - "You have done enough for that girl already."

* * * * *

Understand before reading this that I have been vitally interested in the dance scene in Chicago since 1927 (add five more years prior to that for reading about it before arrival). I have been an active part in a half dozen attempts at a Chicago Ballet and have danced in 41 of its theatres - night clubs and Hotel Shows - I was the only Chicago artist to ever dance in that sacred place - "The Arts Club of Chicago" of which I was at one time a member. I was there upon two occasions with "Dr. Eli Duffy" - once with Patrick Cummings and once with Dean Bodolato. If I seem bitter about the City - its society - its press - its attitude towards Dance - I sincerely love the damned place despite it and have no intention of leaving it upon retirement.

In closing our career as a school - where for the last 31 years we have occupied the 2nd and 3rd floors of a quaint old building - once known as "Yen Hong Lo's Restaurant", they were responsible for the lovely mosaic floor, one wonders why we "stuck it out" in the great wasteland of Chicago - one might as well have spent a lifetime working and teaching in Madagascar, Borneo, Sumatra, Little America or Ellesmere Island. There are very good reasons for it being called "Second City" and they are clearer to me today than when I came here in 1927 when I thought it superior to New York. (It was at one time.)

Most successful dance careers were built by sympathetic writers who plugged away at building rather than criticizing. This eventually builds the artists confidence and they mature into something very special. The critical situation in Chicago has always been ruled by prejudice against "being local" and especially when the word "school" is mentioned. ABT has always had a school - NY City has had one since its inception - as has Martha Graham - Joffrey and any number of others one might mention. In the earlier days when we had Claudia Cassidy, Eugene Stinson, Cecil Smith, Felix Borowski, Remi Gassman, Marion Schillo and Ann Barzel the attitude was somehow different - and yet not one of them singled our group to make it a success - as did Louis Horst for Martha Graham.

Anyone of the local critics could have done the same for Kurt and Grace Graff - Berta Ocshner - Page-Stone - Sybil Shearer - Eloise Moore - Eleanor Block - Berenice Holmes - Ann Sharkey - Charles Bockman - and Laurent Novikoff who truly had a company of first rate dancers from world wide companies - and last but we hope not the least our own Stone Camryn Ballet who had distributed dancers all over the world - realizing very early the hopelessness of Chicago, ABT had as many as 14 of our dancers - as has every major Ballet Company in America or Europe.

Who is to say that this was not better than playing the local "Society Boards" for their money and deceitful patronage as every one in time discovers.

Chicago is a very peculiar town - very provincial - industry oriented - and very doubtful of its own artistic taste. The real success of the great Chicago Civic Opera Company - the Symphony and the Art Institute was due entirely to a very special few citizens with taste, who believed strongly in Art and Music - the Dance never had this.

Despite the sterility of the City it has remained an excellent place to train dancers - simply because there are so few distractions and much more time is spent in learning their trade. The teacher must then build their hope on the big outside world of dance. In this respect our success as a school is not local (this is not to say that we have not made local friends - the recent reception given us proves otherwise) but national and international.

So there is this to be more than grateful for - that many of our earlier students grew up in the school and left well equipped to face the world. They are now a very devoted and grateful group - scattered from here to hell and gone - successful in their own rights. And it was for them and those now growing up in the school that we "stuck it out" in the great dance deprived city of Chicago. We will continue with a chosen few as long as our health holds out.

Personally I have been blessed with the staunch friendship and cooperation of Bentley Stone without whom I may not have endured all these years. Together we have been able to enjoy considerable professional work and still maintain a school of considerable size. Stone was one of America's great classical dancers recognized in England and Europe more than in our own city. If the large repertoire of Ballets we have created had been done in Milwaukee - Pittsburg or Boston our story might have been different. But then we would not have fulfilled our real calling - that of instructing and guidance.

- Walter Camryn

* * * * *

THE FUTURE OF THE BULLETIN

If I could be certain of at least fifty or more subscriptions - paid in advance I might be interested in keeping the Bulletin going for another year or more.

\$5.00 for four issues.

If anyone person is willing to organize the project I am more than willing to let them do it.

- W. C.